

Hours polarization revisited

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From the student with a part-time job to the workaholic manager, working hours can vary dramatically. The economy supplies jobs according to the demands of both employers and employees, although the match is not necessarily perfect. Workers unable to find a sufficient amount of work may suffer financially; those in very demanding jobs may compromise other aspects of their lives. Employers may be in control when labour is in abundant supply, but may have to tailor jobs into more attractive packages of hours and benefits when the labour market is tight.

Research to the mid-1990s showed that greater inequality of earnings was accompanied by increasing polarization of work hours (Morissette 1996). Not only were more people working very short and very long hours, but longer hours were concentrated among those with higher earnings and shorter hours among those with low earnings.

Recent attention has focused on a decline in actual working hours. Although a portion of the decline could be explained by survey methodology, other factors played a part (Galarneau, Maynard and Lee 2005). These included shifts in family work patterns, more growth in industries with lower average hours and the aging of the workforce. This article quantifies the decline in average usual working hours over 10 years and examines how changes in the distribution of working hours contributed to the overall trend.

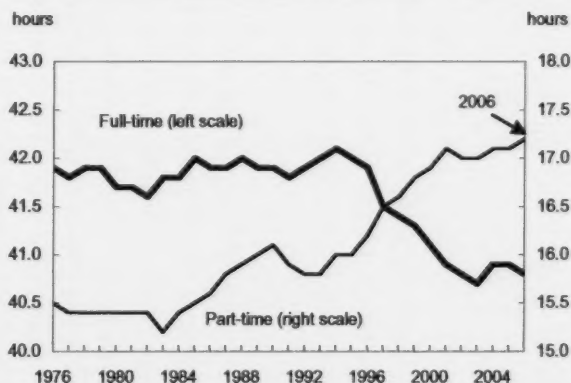
Canada is not the only country showing a decline in usual hours worked per week. Of the 24 countries reported in the OECD database, 22 showed a decline in their weekly usual hours worked since 1997 (for further details see *International comparisons*).

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Over the last thirty years, the average workweek declined, from 38.6 hours in 1976 to 36.5 in 2006. The bulk of the decline occurred between 1976 and 1996 (-1.6 hours) and can be explained mostly by more employment growth in part-time work than in full-time (30 hours or more). The proportion of people working part time increased from around 13% in 1976 to a high of 19% in 1996. But after 1997, part-time growth weakened, and full-time became stronger. Why then the continuing decline in usual hours when more full-time workers are coming into the labour market?

This paper uses the Labour Force Survey to look at average usual hours worked per week (at main job) and changes in work-hour distributions (see *Data sources and definitions*). Work-hour changes reflect employment growth, demographic shifts and shifts in industry, occupation, class of worker and educational attain-

Chart A Average full-time hours down, average part-time up



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

ment patterns. The paper also examines provincial differences and compares Canada with other countries.

Full-time hours declined, part-time hours increased

Between 1997 and 2006, hours worked by full-time workers declined, from 41.5 hours to 40.8, having remained stable at around 42 hours between 1976 and 1996 (Chart A). This decline in the last 10 years occurred even as full-time employment increased—its share climbing from 80.9% in 1997 to 82.0% in 2006. At the same time, average hours for part-time workers increased, from 16.5 hours in 1997 to 17.2 hours in 2006.

Moving away from polarization of hours

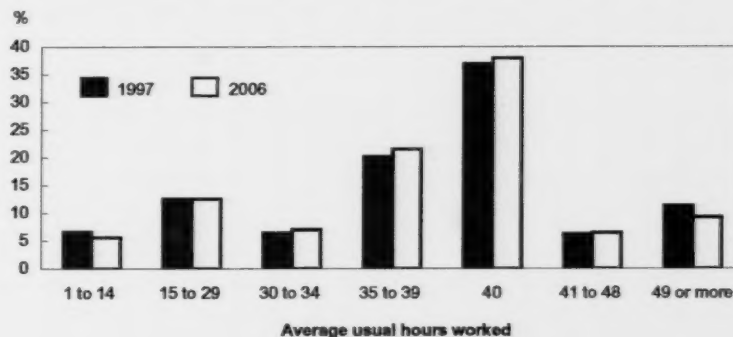
Looking at the hours distribution provides further insight. Although a majority work 35 to 40 hours per week (59% in 2006), shifts have occurred.

Increases occurred as more worked 30 to 48 hours in the last 10 years—72.8% of all workers reported working within this band of hours in 2006 compared with 69.6% in 1997 (Chart B). On the other hand, fewer worked at the extremes—under 15 hours and 49 or more.

This is a shift away from the polarization of the 1980s to mid-1990s—when an increasing proportion of people were working shorter (less than 30) and longer hours (49 or more) (Sunter and Morissette 1994).

Average hours for part-time workers are increasing because fewer are working under 15 hours per week. On the other hand, full-time hours

Chart B More working 30 to 40 hours and fewer at the extremes



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

are decreasing because fewer people are working 49 hours or more. The fastest growing proportion is in the middle range of 30 to 40 hours per week.

Women, men, youth, core-age and older workers have all moved away from working shorter and longer hours. This is despite major work-hour differences between these groups. Women and youth tend to work short to standard hours, whereas men work standard to longer hours (35 hours or more). Schedules for older workers are much more dispersed.

Women increasing hours

Not only are women more likely now to be employed, they have also increased their work hours (Table 1). In 2006, women worked an average of 33.1 hours per week, an increase of 0.6 hours since 1997. Over the period, women showed a large shift from short- or part-time hours (less than 30) toward 30 to 40 hours.

Since 1997, a larger share of the increase in employment went to women (54.8%) than to men, and the vast majority was full-time (87.1%). Only from 1976 to 1981, an era when full time was the norm, was a larger proportion of women working full time than now. In 2006, 73.9% of women were working 30 hours or more, compared with 70.7% in 1997.

Mothers influencing hours shift

One in three women aged 15 to 54 (35.3%) were mothers of children under 16 years of age in 2006. These mothers played a large role in the growth of both employment and hours worked in the past decade. Mothers of young children are becoming more attached to the labour market, as more of them are highly educated and start their careers before having children. Over the last 30 years, mothers have seen their employment rate almost double, from 39.1% in 1976 to 72.9% in 2006.

Table 1 Employment distribution by usual hours

	Both sexes		Men		Women	
	1997	2006	1997	2006	1997	2006
	%					
All ages						
1 to 14 hours	6.6	5.5	4.0	3.6	9.6	7.6
15 to 29 hours	12.5	12.5	6.5	7.2	19.7	18.5
30 to 34 hours	6.4	7.0	4.1	4.4	9.1	9.8
35 to 39 hours	20.2	21.5	14.5	16.0	27.0	27.7
40 hours	36.9	37.9	45.6	46.1	26.5	28.8
41 to 48 hours	6.2	6.4	8.6	8.9	3.3	3.5
49 hours or more	11.3	9.2	16.7	13.8	4.8	4.0
Average hours	36.7	36.5	40.2	39.6	32.5	33.1
15 to 24						
1 to 14 hours	21.1	17.5	17.4	14.4	25.2	20.5
15 to 29 hours	24.3	26.6	20.3	22.2	28.8	31.0
30 to 34 hours	7.7	8.0	6.2	6.9	9.2	9.2
35 to 39 hours	10.6	11.7	8.7	9.9	12.6	13.6
40 hours	27.6	28.8	34.3	35.4	20.2	22.1
41 to 48 hours	4.3	4.0	6.1	5.7	2.4	2.2
49 hours or more	4.4	3.5	7.0	5.5	1.6	1.4
Average hours	28.3	28.8	31.0	31.3	25.2	26.3
25 to 54						
1 to 14 hours	3.5	2.6	1.3	1.1	6.0	4.2
15 to 29 hours	10.0	9.0	3.5	3.5	17.6	15.2
30 to 34 hours	6.0	6.5	3.4	3.5	9.1	9.9
35 to 39 hours	22.6	23.9	16.0	17.5	30.4	31.1
40 hours	39.2	41.1	48.6	49.9	28.2	31.4
41 to 48 hours	6.6	7.0	9.3	9.7	3.5	3.9
49 hours or more	12.1	9.8	17.9	14.8	5.2	4.3
Average hours	38.3	38.3	42.0	41.4	34.0	34.9
55 and over						
1 to 14 hours	8.5	7.2	5.1	4.9	14.0	10.3
15 to 29 hours	14.0	14.7	9.2	9.8	21.9	21.2
30 to 34 hours	7.3	7.9	6.1	6.2	9.3	10.2
35 to 39 hours	15.6	20.0	11.9	14.8	21.8	26.9
40 hours	33.5	32.0	40.1	38.7	22.8	23.0
41 to 48 hours	5.5	6.0	7.1	8.3	3.0	3.0
49 hours or more	15.5	12.2	20.5	17.3	7.2	5.4
Average hours	36.8	36.3	40.2	39.3	31.4	32.3

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

The extension of maternity and parental benefits from the Employment Insurance program in 2000 also encouraged more mothers to stay in the labour market (Zhang 2007). Benefits from this program allow them to care for their infants longer (up to 12

months) and to return to their jobs (labour codes protect jobs of employees taking paid or unpaid maternity or parental leave). Based on the most recent Employment Insurance Coverage Survey, the proportion of mothers with insurable incomes increased, from

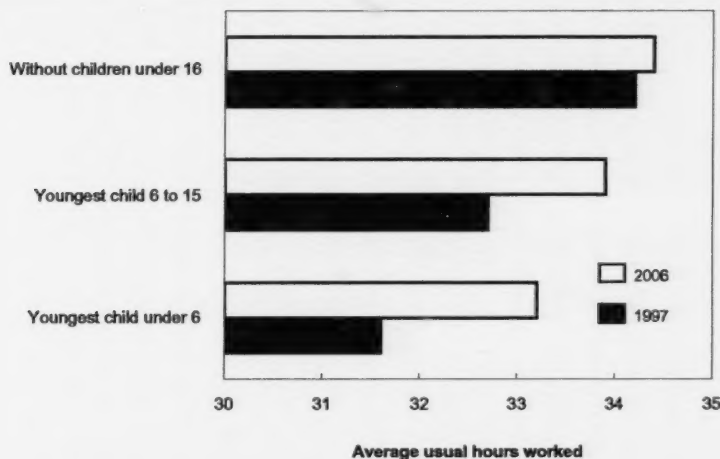
73.5% in 2002 to 76.5% in 2006. Eight in 10 mothers who received benefits returned or planned to return to their jobs within two years and the average duration of time away was 12 months in 2006.

Over the last 10 years, the proportion of mothers working part time dropped as more worked 30 to 40 hours per week. In 2006, 68.5% of mothers with children under 16 at home worked between 30 and 40 hours versus 62.1% in 1997. Mothers with children under 6 increased their usual hours at work by 1.6, to 33.2, while mothers with children 6 to 15 increased their hours by 1.2, to 33.9 (Chart C). Both groups of mothers are approaching the average hours worked of mothers without dependent children at home. During the same period, hours changed minimally for mothers without dependent children at home (34.4 in 2006).

While hours increased for mothers with children under 16 at home, their employment was up only 8.7% in the 10 years. It was women without children under 16 at home who experienced the largest employment gains, close to 30%. They also increased their hours in the middle range, as 69.8% of women without young children at home worked 30 to 40 hours in 2006 compared with 67.2% in 1997.

Men are cutting back hours

As mentioned, men's weekly work hours differ greatly from women's. Men are more likely to work standard to long hours and fewer work part time. Hours worked by men in the last 10 years shifted from the extreme short and long hours toward the 15 to 48 range.

Chart C Mothers with young children working longer hours

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

The decline in the proportion of men working very long hours (49 or more) was much more significant than the decline in short hours (less than 15), especially for men aged 25 to 54 and those 55 or older. In 1997, 16.7% of men of all ages worked 49 hours or more compared with 13.8% in 2006, while the proportion working under 15 hours was virtually unchanged. Unlike women, who experienced an increase in their average usual hours, men saw a decline in their workweek, as fewer men worked very long hours.

Core-age, older workers, youth also influenced trend

In 2006, a larger share of core-age workers (aged 25 to 54) worked 30 to 48 hours (78.6%) than 10 years earlier (74.4%). This shift toward the middle ranges resulted from fewer women working part time and fewer men working

49 hours or more. This led to an increase in the average workweek for core-age women and a decline for core-age men, leaving the overall usual hours in 2006 unchanged since 1997, at 38.3.

Compared with core-age workers, older workers have schedules that vary much more. In 2006, older

workers were more likely to work part time than core-age workers (21.9% versus 11.6%), and were more likely to have longer workweeks—18.2% worked 41 hours or more, compared with 16.8% of those aged 25 to 54.

Among both men and women and all age groups, workers aged 55 and over had the largest shift away from very long hours (49 or more) and the largest growth in working between 15 and 39 hours in 2006. As a result, the standard workweek for older workers declined by 0.5 hours to 36.3 in 2006.

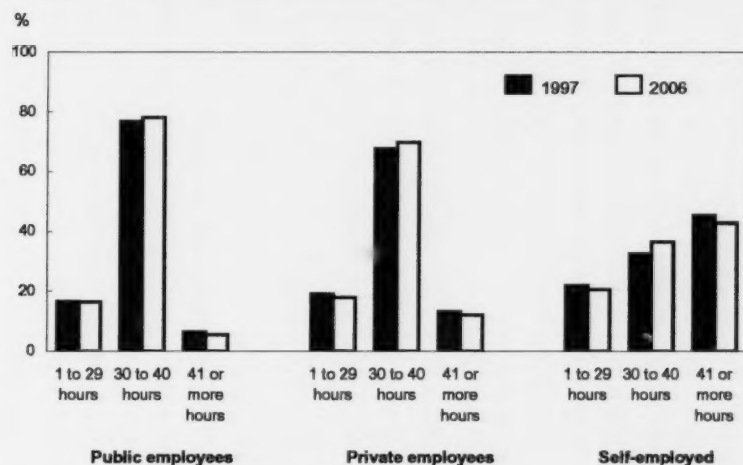
Interestingly, the increase in working 15 to 29 hours by older workers was for men only. While a larger proportion of older men worked 15 to 29 hours in 2006, fewer worked a 40-hour schedule (or 49 hours or more). This might indicate that older men are phasing into retirement as more of them cut back their hours or take on part-time hours after their career jobs are finished. In 2006, almost three in four men aged 55 and over worked part time out of personal preference compared with one in four men 25 to 54 (Marshall and Ferreo 2007).

Data sources and definitions

With the exception of the international numbers, data in this article are from the Labour Force Survey. The LFS collects information on both usual and actual hours worked. This paper looks only at hours that respondents usually work during the week at their main jobs. These usual hours do not take into account overtime, holidays, vacations, illness or strikes.

Since 1997, the usual hours question has included only hours worked in a week for regular pay rates. Before the 1997 redesign, if an employee usually worked unpaid or paid overtime hours, those hours were included as usual hours worked. Since 1997, these hours have been captured separately.

Most of the international data come from the OECD statistical database at http://www.oecd.org/document/25/0,3343,en_2825_495670_38939225_1_1_1,00.html.

Chart D More self-employed work longer hours, but the proportion is decreasing

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

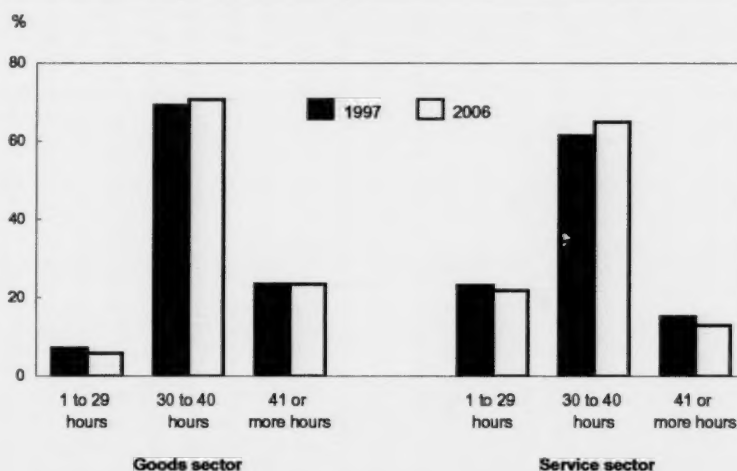
In 2006, full-time students represented 40% of employed youth (up from 38% in 1997). They increased their hours worked by 1.7 from 1997, to an average of 15.2, as a greater proportion worked between 15 and 29 hours in 2006. Non-student youth increased their work week by 0.5 hours in 2006, as a larger proportion worked 35 to 40 hours.¹

Even the self-employed working shorter hours

Work hours of the self-employed differ greatly from those of employees (Chart D). In 2006, business owners were four times more likely to work long hours (41 or more) than employees in private firms or public institutions (42.9% versus 10.7%). Fewer of the self-employed worked between 30 and

Although all age groups influenced the trend toward 30 to 48 hours, older workers may have had a larger influence than core-age workers or youth. Their employment growth during this period was far greater—their share of employment increased from 10% in 1997 to 14% in 2006, while the share of core-age workers declined (from 75% to 70%) and the share of young workers remained at 15%.

The vast majority of those 15 to 24 usually worked 40 hours or less a week in 2006 (92.5%). Their workweek averaged 28.8 hours in 2006, up 0.5 from 1997. This average is strongly influenced by two main groups: full-time students, who tend to work part time; and non-student youth, whose hours vary but most of whom work between 30 and 40 hours.

Chart E Most of the shift in hours occurred in the service sector, which accounts for 3 in 4 workers

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

40 hours (36.5% versus 71.7%). Despite these differences, a larger proportion of the self-employed moved from short and, particularly, long workweeks to 30 to 40 hours over the past decade.

The self-employed are, however, less prominent today: in 1997, they represented 17.1% of the employed, but by 2006 their share had declined to 15.2%. Although more business owners moved toward 30 to 40 hours, private-sector employees likely had a larger impact on the overall work week average, since they were the only

group to see an increase in employment numbers and they made up the largest component of employment. In 2006, 65.4% of the employed worked for private firms compared with 63.5% in 1997.

Service sector major influence

The shift toward service-related jobs in the last 10 years also had a large impact on average hours. The service-producing sector accounted for 76% of employment in 2006, and 85% of all new jobs

since 1997. Workers in this sector tend to work short or standard hours, whereas those in the goods-producing sector tend to work standard to long hours (Chart E).

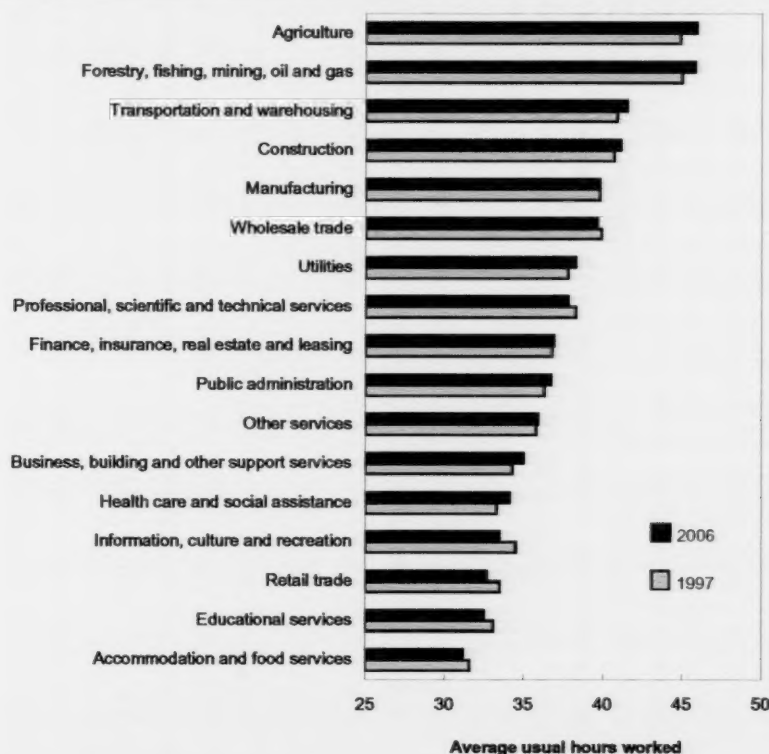
Of the 11 major industries in the service sector, only two did not follow the general trend toward an increased proportion of workers in the 30 to 40 range at the expense of short and long hours. Workers in transportation and warehousing had growth in long hours only (41 or more) while those in information, culture and recreational services had growth only in short hours (less than 30).

In the goods-producing sector, more workers in agriculture and construction reported working 30 to 48 hours, while in manufacturing all of the growth was in the 30 to 40 range. Forestry, fishing, mining, oil and gas extraction, and utilities showed an increase in long hours only (41 or more) (Chart F).

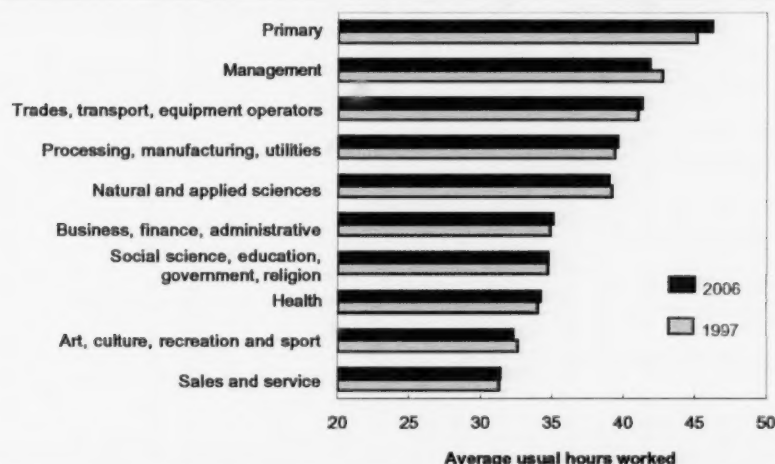
These industry changes are mirrored by occupations, as most service-related occupations had growth in the proportion working 30 to 40 hours. Trades, transport and equipment operators, and occupations unique to primary industry had growth in those putting in 30 to 48 hours, while processing, manufacturing and utilities had longer hours in 2006 than 10 years earlier, with a growth in schedules exceeding 40 hours (Chart G).

In the ten-year period, close to 80% of all employment growth was in white-collar occupations: natural and applied sciences; health; social science, education, government service, and religion; art, culture, recreation and sport; sales and service; and business, finance and administrative services (Chart H). These occupations all

Chart F Goods-producing industries have longest work weeks



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

Chart G Blue-collar workers and managers have the longest work weeks

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

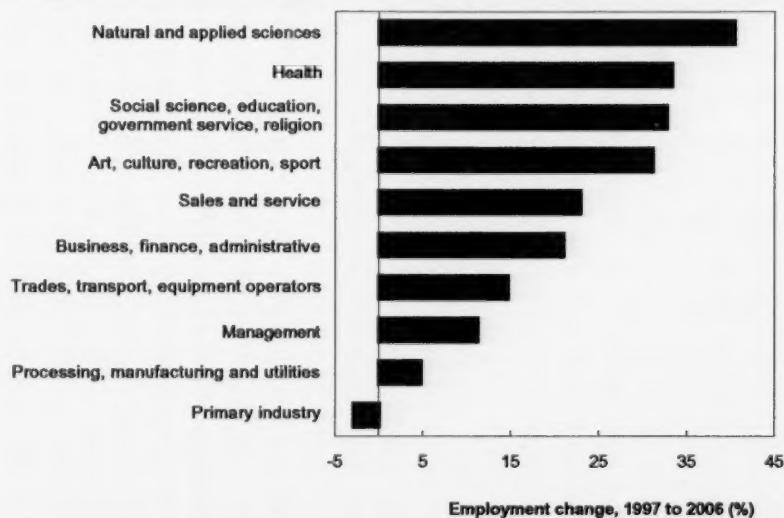
saw large growth in 30 to 40 hours. On the other hand, blue-collar occupations (those in primary industries; processing, manufacturing and utilities; and trades, transport, and equipment operators) and management, which tend to have longer hours, experienced below average employment growth.

Education matters

Not only are those with postsecondary accreditation more likely to be employed, they are also more likely to be working standard rather than long hours (Table 2). Between 1997 and 2006, most of the employment growth among adult workers (aged 25 and over) was among those with a college diploma, trade certificate or university degree. In 2006, 71.4% of those aged 25 and over with postsecondary accreditation usually worked 30

to 40 hours per week compared with 66.7% of workers without postsecondary education.

From 1997 to 2006, the proportion of those with postsecondary education working long hours (41 or more) declined sharply, particularly for men with a university degree. Whereas 27.1% of men with a university degree worked 41 hours or more in 1997, only 21.5% did so in 2006. In fact, men without postsecondary education were more likely to be working 41 hours or more (28.1%) than men with a university degree in 2006. This decline in long hours for men with a university education brought their average usual hours down by 1.3 to 39.8 in 2006, a much larger decline than for men in the other two educational groups.

Chart H Greater growth in white-collar jobs (except managers), where hours are more flexible and varied

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

Table 2 Distribution of usual hours worked by education (age 25 and over)

	1-29	30-40	41 or more	Average
1997		%		hours
Less than postsecondary	15.1	65.1	19.8	38.4
Men	6.3	64.9	28.8	42.1
Women	26.1	65.3	8.6	33.6
Postsecondary certificate or diploma	14.4	68.5	17.1	37.8
Men	5.0	69.6	25.3	41.6
Women	25.2	67.1	7.6	33.5
University degree	13.4	66.4	20.1	38.3
Men	7.1	65.8	27.1	41.1
Women	21.3	67.2	11.5	34.8
2006				
Less than postsecondary	13.9	66.7	19.4	38.5
Men	6.4	65.5	28.1	41.8
Women	23.2	68.2	8.6	34.3
Postsecondary certificate or diploma	13.0	71.3	15.7	37.8
Men	5.5	71.1	23.4	41.0
Women	21.1	71.5	7.4	34.3
University degree	13.1	71.5	15.4	37.5
Men	7.7	70.7	21.5	39.8
Women	18.8	72.3	8.9	34.9

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

earlier, more people were working 40 to 48 hours per week in Alberta, while fewer worked less than 30 or 49 hours or more.

Quebec stood out with the largest hours increase in the 15 to 40 range, while fewer worked long hours. This province had the largest proportion of people working 15 to 40 hours per week, 84.4% in 2006 versus the Canadian average of 78.9%. Average usual hours were the lowest at 35.5 hours per week, and showed the largest decline (-0.8 hours) from 1997 to 2006.

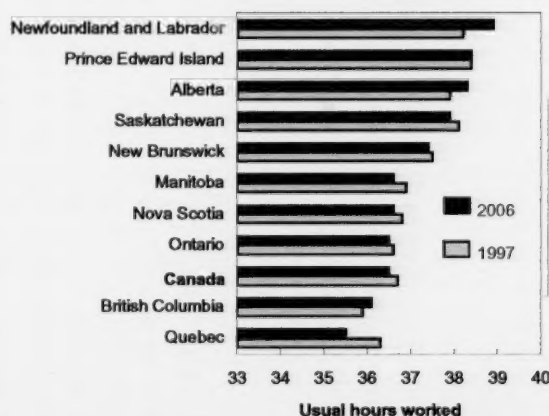
Many reasons have been cited for Quebec's shorter workweek compared with other provinces: a preference for shorter schedules; the public-sector norm of a 35-hour work week (versus 37.5 in other provinces); and the high unionization rate, which may also affect work hours among the non-

While education seems to influence hours worked by men, the standard workweek for women varies minimally by education. In 2006, women with less than postsecondary certification and women with a postsecondary diploma worked an average of 34.3 hours per week while women with a university degree worked 34.9 hours.

Quebec has shortest average workweek

Newfoundland and Labrador was the only province to buck the trend away from growth in workweeks of 30 to 40 hours, with an increase in the share of people working 41 or more hours (Chart I). The growth in long hours started in 2003, and by 2006, Newfoundland and Labrador had the highest average usual hours worked at 38.9, an increase of almost one hour since 1997.

Alberta also had an increase in its average usual hours worked—to 38.3 per week in 2006—prompted by the highest employment growth rate of all provinces between 1997 and 2006. Compared with 10 years

Chart I Only three provinces had increases in usual hours worked

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

unionized. Quebec also has a larger share of workers with a short-year, full-time schedule (Heisz and LaRochelle-Côté 2007).

International comparisons

Trends in Canada's usual hours worked were quite similar to those in other countries (Table 3). Of the 16 countries listed, 14 had declines in average usual hours of work between 1997 and 2006, with more consistent declines occurring for men.

At 36.5, Canada's average usual hours rank in the middle, although in many countries, men's average workweek is longer than in Canada. For women, their average workweek ranked as the 6th highest. This high ranking in hours matches Canada's high rate of employment for women. Among OECD countries, Canadian women ranked 5th in their rate of employment, as 69.0% of women aged 15 to 64 were employed in 2006. Only Denmark (73.2%), Norway (72.3%), Sweden (72.1%) and Switzerland (71.1%) had higher rates.

The Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland) all have high rates of labour market participation among mothers. These countries offer generous maternal and parental leave benefits and subsidized childcare services for preschool children—services that have been proven to encourage women's ongoing participation in the labour market.

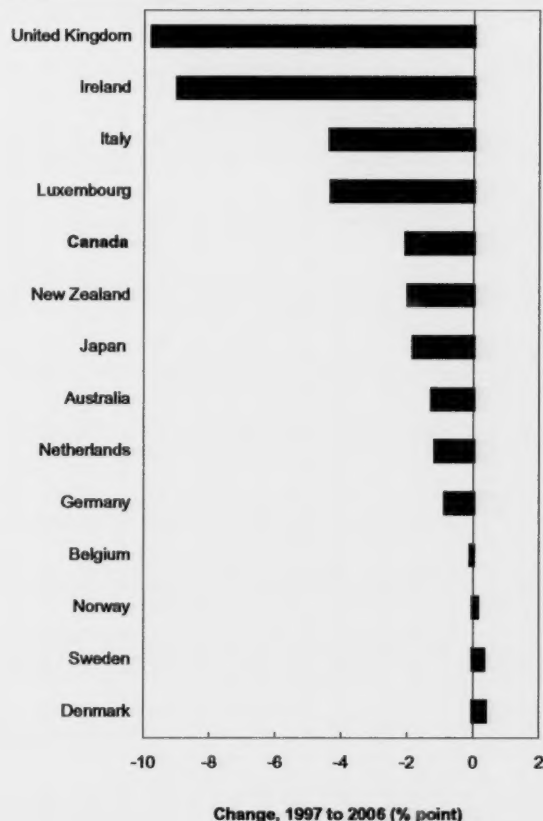
When looking at the more detailed hour categories (available only for selected countries), most OECD countries (11 of 14), like Canada, had declines in the proportion of people working long hours (50 or more) (Chart J).

Results were mixed in 30 to 40 hours worked, as almost half of the countries had increases while the others had declines.

Canada experienced a decline in the part-time rate (less than 30 hours) from 1997 to 2006, a trend also observed in only four other countries: France, the United States, New Zealand and Sweden (Table 4). Despite the decline, Canada's part-time rate remained close to the combined rate of the G7 countries, the OECD average and Europe.

The Canadian part-time rate fell for women while increasing marginally for men. Seven other countries had declines in women's part-time rates, with similar decreases in Sweden, Norway, France, New Zealand,

Chart J Most OECD countries saw a decline in the proportion working 50 or more hours a week



Note: Data for Australia are for 1998 instead of 1997; Norway and Japan, 2002 instead of 1997; and Japan is for 49 hours or more.

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

and the United Kingdom. At 26.2% in 2006, the part-time rate for Canadian women was among the lowest, whereas for men it was among the highest—at 10.9%, almost double the European average of 6.5%.

Table 3 Average usual weekly hours at main job, selected countries

	Men		Women	
	1997	2006	1997	2006
	Hours			
Australia	42.3	41.1	30.9	30.9
Belgium	40.6	40.5	33.3	32.3
Canada	40.2	39.6	32.5	33.1
Denmark	37.7	38.5	32.4	31.9
Finland	40.8	39.8	36.7	35.7
France	41.1	41.2	34.3	34.3
Germany	41.2	40.0	32.7	30.2
Ireland	44.3	40.3	34.1	31.6
Italy	41.4	41.8	35.7	33.9
Luxembourg	41.0	40.1	34.7	33.6
Netherlands	38.0	36.1	25.5	24.3
New Zealand	43.7	42.6	32.0	32.4
Norway	39.0	36.9	31.4	30.1
Sweden	39.6	38.8	33.6	33.9
Switzerland	42.1	40.7	29.7	28.5
United Kingdom	44.1	41.8	30.9	31.3

Note: Switzerland uses 2005 instead of 2006.

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Table 4 Part-time employment rate in selected countries

	Men		Women	
	1997	2006	1997	2006
	%			
OECD countries	7.6	8.1	25.7	26.4
Europe	5.4	6.5	26.3	28.7
G-7 countries	8.5	8.7	27.6	27.8
Australia	14.6	16.0	41.0	40.7
Belgium	4.4	6.7	30.5	34.7
Canada	10.5	10.9	29.4	26.2
Denmark	11.1	11.4	24.5	25.6
France	5.9	5.1	25.8	22.9
Germany	4.1	7.6	31.4	39.2
Ireland	6.9	7.7	27.6	34.9
Italy	5.1	5.3	22.2	29.4
Japan	12.9	12.8	38.3	40.9
Netherlands	11.1	15.8	54.9	59.7
New Zealand	10.4	10.1	37.0	34.5
Norway	7.7	10.6	36.5	32.9
Sweden	6.5	8.4	22.6	19.0
Switzerland	7.1	8.8	45.7	45.7
United Kingdom	8.2	9.9	41.0	38.8
United States	8.2	7.8	19.4	17.8

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Summary

Usual hours of work declined even as more full-time workers came into the labour market between 1997 and 2006. Average usual hours fell because more people were working 30 to 48 hours (especially 30 to 40 hours), as the drop in very long hours (49 or more) more than offset the decline in short hours (under 15).

Women, with a stronger presence in the labour market now than ever before, increased their hours. More moved from part-time hours to 30 to 40 hours. Men's hours, however, declined, as fewer worked very long hours.

Canada's strong labour market in the last 10 years also influenced hours worked. It attracted more women, mothers with dependent children, youth and older workers into the labour force—groups that generally prefer varied hours.

A number of factors influenced the decline in the category over 49 hours: more jobs in the services sector (where hours are more varied and flexible); and less prominence for groups that tend to work long hours (e.g. the self-employed, workers in the goods-producing sector, and managers and blue-collar workers).

Those with postsecondary education were also less likely to be working long schedules than 10 years earlier. Work-life balance may also play a part in this—as more women, and particularly mothers, join the labour market, it becomes more important to balance work and personal life. The trend toward fewer people working long hours per week is also occurring in many other countries.

Perspectives

Notes

1. Student and non-student hours and employment are based on 8-month averages (January to April and September to December).

References

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